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INFO RUEHXK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 000897

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/22/2019
TAGS: PREL KWBG RU UN IS
SUBJECT: ISRAEL ASKS RUSSIAN DFM TO POSTPONE UNSC
DISCUSSION

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Luis Moreno, reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. On April 21, PolOff met with Russian Embassy Political Counselor Alexey Skosyrev to discuss the recent visit to Israel by Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Saltanov. Saltanov's main meetings were with Prime Minister Netanyahu, Foreign Minister Lieberman, and National Security Advisor Uzi Arad. The Israelis reportedly asked Saltanov for patience while they develop their Palestinian policy, underlining that new ideas were needed. Because of this policy review, the Israelis also asked Russia to postpone the May 11 UN Security Council discussion on the Middle East. In addition, Arad asked Saltanov to postpone the proposed Moscow Conference to the fall, and suggested that the conference should focus on regional peace issues. During his meeting with Saltanov, FM Lieberman reportedly stressed improved bilateral relations and an upgrade in the Israel-Russia strategic dialogue, while seeking assurances on the sale of advanced weaponry to Syria and Iran. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Skosyrev told PolOff that the primary Israeli talking point during the visit of DFM Saltanov was that peace efforts with the Palestinians over the past 16 years since the Oslo agreements had failed, and that new ideas were needed. The Israelis also asked for patience while they developed their new policy, which they said would be done in about 4 weeks.

¶3. (C) As part of the request for patience, the Israelis underscored to Saltanov that Russia's plan to hold a high-level UN Security Council meeting on the Middle East on May 11, during Russia's presidency, was poorly timed. Skosyrev said that the Israelis felt it would be unfair to hold this discussion before their policy review was complete, and argued that it should be postponed.

¶4. (C) During the meeting with Uzi Arad, Skosyrev said that Arad brought up the proposed Moscow Peace Conference. Arad reportedly wants the Moscow Conference to be focused on regional efforts to support Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Arab peace, and suggested that it be used to revive the multilateral tracks from the Madrid Conference, although now with only three committees: economics, environment, and regional security. Arad also asked that the Moscow conference be held in the fall, and not the summer as Russia has suggested.

¶5. (C) Skosyrev said that the most interesting meeting for DFM Saltanov was with FM Lieberman, as Lieberman focused on reinvigorating the Israel-Russia strategic dialogue. (Note: Skosyrev previously told Pol Couns that Lieberman recently gave an interview to a Russian radio station in which he said that as Foreign Minister, he planned to elevate Israeli-Russian relations to the same level as Israeli-U.S. relations.) Skosyrev believes that Lieberman is serious about improving the bilateral relationship, and noted that the meeting was held completely in Russian and attended exclusively by Lieberman's Russian-speaking advisors.

¶6. (C) Finally, Skosyrev said that the Israelis brought up the issue of Russian arms sales to Syria and Iran. Saltanov told the Israelis that Russia would only provide "defensive weapons" to those countries, and would not sell them anything that would alter the strategic balance in the region.

¶7. (C) Comment. Russia has long argued that it will only sell defensive weapons to Iran and Syria, so the Israelis were likely unimpressed with this response. On the other hand, their primary concern has been a Russian sale of the S-300 surface to air missile system, which could be considered capable of altering the strategic balance.

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